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Save the murals: The turtles, 1993

FROM STAFF REPORTS

CHAPEL HILL -- The Preservation Society of Chapel Hill is dedicated to saving those things that make Chapel Hill unique. The society is asking the community to help preserve these community treasures by e-mailing thoughts about them to [savethemurals@mail.com](mailto:savethemurals@mail.com). If the society gets enough support it plans to create an Adopt a Mural program, allowing residents to save their favorite mural.

Local photographer Laura Shmania has created a photo gallery of Michael Brown's murals on her Web site for those who may not be aware of his artwork.

"I am so appreciative of this effort to save the murals!" she wrote us last week. "The murals are incredibly varied in subject and style and add such wonderful color and humor to our streetscape. I encourage folks to take a stroll through this web-based photo gallery and then walk the streets of Chapel Hill to see the murals up close!"

To see Shmania's "Murals by Michael Brown" gallery go to [www.butterflites.smugmug.com](http://www.butterflites.smugmug.com).

Artist's statement by Michael Brown

"The turtle mural on Columbia Street, across from the homeless shelter was painted in 1993. Over the years lots of people have asked me, 'Why turtles?'

"There are a number of reasons: First, in my youth, I used to keep pet turtles, sometimes dozens at a time. I still just love them.

"Another reason was that one of my elementary school teachers back in 1963 told me that during the age of the dinosaurs we here in Chapel Hill were under water. As a kid I enjoyed walking around "Up town" and imagining dinosaurs swimming past the planetarium. Maybe one still lived, I thought, in the UNC steam tunnels.

"Third, I had asked the design review board if I could paint a dinosaur the year before. But they said 'No!' I asked them this because I had a lot of young volunteers helping paint that year and I thought they might be inspired just as I was. Since I knew that turtles have been around since the dingo-days a year later I suggested a sea turtle.



This mural on Columbia Street was painted by Michael Brown in 1993. Brown says his inspiration was his pet turtles. Contributed photo

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"They said 'Yes!' and I got to paint my dinosaur after all.

Finally, at that point, I had been painting murals full time for four years, and I was hearing a lot about an artist who went around the country painting whales. I was getting pretty tired of it. I had seen some of them and felt I could produce as good or better a painting than this nationally famous fellow was doing. Yes, there is some truth in the phrase 'artistic ego,' because I think I did."

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